THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • THURSDAY • MARCH 06, 2025 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 20 • LATE CITY EDITION

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CABINET OKs ROPEWAY PROJECTS FOR KEDARNATH, HEMKUND SAHIB

The Centre on Wednesday approved two ropeway projects in Uttarakhand to ease pilgrim access to Kedarnath and Hemkund Sahib shrines

CUTS TRAVEL TIME FROM 9 HRS TO JUST 36 MINS

The 16-km uphill trek to Kedarnath from Gaurikund is currently covered on foot, ponies, palanquins or helicopters. The ₹4,081 crore ropeway will cover 12.9 km, using advanced tricable gondola technology to carry 18,000 passengers daily, ensuring all-weather connectivity between Sonprayag and Kedarnath by cutting travel time from 9 hours to just 36 minutes

SKY LIFTS TO FERRY 11,000 PILGRIMS DAILY

- The Hemkund ropeway, to be developed at ₹2,730 crore, will span 12.4 km from Govindghat, using monocable and tricable gondolas, carrying 11,000 people daily and enhancing last-mile connectivity
- Hemkund Sahib is a revered pilgrimage site and remains open from May to September, drawing 1.5 to 2 lakh pilgrims annually | P9

₹6,811 crore

WORTH PROJECTS ARE EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED IN 4-6 YEARS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

'WHY THIS HURRY?'

Speaking after the meeting, AIADMK organising secretary D Jayakumar said, "A drama has been enacted today to create an impression that the DMK is the only protector of Tamil Nadu's rights"

'REFORM SYSTEM FIRST'

TVK president and actor Vijay, in a detailed statement on delimitation, argued that increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats without reforming present system is of no use

Reciprocal tariff on India from Apr 2

Donald Trump addresses his first joint session of Congress at the Capitol in Washington on Tuesday after beginning his second term as US President | AP

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

PRESIDENT Donald Trump announced reciprocal tariffs on India starting April 2, signaling a tough path ahead in the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations as they could clash with these sweeping tariffs.

But New Delhi remains hopeful that the understanding reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump on February 13 will help resolve trade issues and keep the September deadline for signing the first tranche of the FTA, as Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal began his US trip on Monday to meet the new United States Trade Representative (USTR), Jamieson Greer.

Piyush Goyal

In his first address of his second term to a joint session of Congress, President Trump defended his strict tariff policies, highlighting that the US has long faced high tariffs from several countries, including India. He announced that his administration would impose reciprocal tariffs on several countries starting April 2.

The White House had earlier put out a factsheet on India's tariff regime: "The US average applied Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff on agricultural goods is 5%. But India's average applied MFN tariff is 39%. India also charges a 100% tariff on US motorcycles, while we only charge a 2.4% tariff on Indian motorcycles."

However, New Delhi is hopeful that "trade issues can be sorted mutually" as India-US ties are "multifaceted" in line with understanding arrived at the meeting between Modi and Trump. "We have a roadmap that will ensure we sort out any issue through consultations," said a source.

Steps to open the door for US products

India has taken steps to enhance market access for US agricultural products like alfalfa hay, duck meat, and medical devices and lowered tariffs on US products such as bourbon whiskey, motorcycles, ICT products, and metals. "The plan we have chalked out while setting a trade target of 500 billion USD by 2030 is mutually agreeable. It has many elements as agreed between the leadership of two countries, including increasing US industrial exports to India and expanding Indian exports of labour-intensive products to the US," a source said

TN parties want retention of state LS seats till 2056

Resolution passed to form Joint Action Committee with southern MPs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

AS many as 59 Tamil Nadu political parties on Wednesday unanimously demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi unequivocally assure in Parliament that the 1971 population census will remain the basis for delimitation of Lok Sabha seats for another 30 years — till 2056 — by adopting a resolution to this effect at the all-party meeting chaired by Chief Minister M K Stalin.

The resolution, proposed by the CM at the meeting held to discuss the impacts of the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats expected in 2026, also urged for a constitutional amendment ensuring the same.

It was also resolved that formal invitations would be sent to form a Joint Action Committee, comprising of MPs from southern states, to carry forward delimitation-related demands and spread awareness among the public.

Tamil Nadu CM Stalin at the all-party meeting in Chennai on Wednesday

The all-party meeting strongly and unanimously registered its opposition to the delimitation exercise based on present population, which it termed as a "grave threat" to the representative rights of TN and other southern states and the country's federal polity.

Of the 66 recognised and registered parties invited by the TN government for the meeting, only the BJP, Naam Tamilar Katchi and five other smaller parties — Puthiya Tamilagam, Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar), Puthiya Neethi Katchi, Dr MGR Kudiyarasu Katchi and the India Makkal Kalvi Munnetra Kazhagam — skipped it.

Stating that the resolutions adopted at the meet conveyed TN's stand loud and clear, CM Stalin, later in a post on X, said that the all-party meeting also clarified that the state is not against delimitation, but it cannot and will not allow delimitation to be used as a disguised weapon against progressive states. Another resolution passed stated that if parliamentary seats are to be increased, TN's existing share of 7.18% of the total seats in Lok Sabha must not be reduced under any circumstance. EXPLAINER: P9

Split BBMP into seven corpns, suggests House review panel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state legislature Joint Review Committee, which examined the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, tabled its recommendation in the Assembly on Wednesday. The committee, headed by Congress MLA Rizwan Arshad, recommended splitting the existing Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) into not more than seven smaller corporations and to establish a Greater Bengaluru Authority, headed by chief minister, for coordinating and supervising development work.

The committee recommended the terms of the mayor and deputy mayor to be 30 months.

It also suggested that the Bill be tabled in both houses.

The Greater Bengaluru Authority, it suggested, will monitor and coordinate development work in the Greater Bengaluru area. It will to integrate and streamline accountability of all public authorities delivering services in Greater Bengaluru. "Our committee discussed decentralisation of power, transparency, controlling corruption and other issues. For all these issues, reclassification of BBMP is the solution," Rizwan said.

Tabling the recommendations, Rizwan said the committee met various stakeholders, including the advocate general and legal experts, city MLAs, public organisations and the common public at various zones across Bengaluru. Many sent their suggestions through email.

Rizwan said when BBMP was formed in 2008, Bengaluru's population was around 75 lakh and now, in 2025, it is around 1.4 crore and vehicular population itself is one crore. There is no coordination between BBMP, BWSSB, BMRC, BMRCL and other civic agencies. P2

RANYA RAO CASE

Assets worth ₹4.73 cr seized from house

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

OFFICERS of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) raided 33-year-old Kannada actress Ranya Rao's residence on Lavelle Road and seized assets worth Rs 4.73 crore. The officials had on Monday arrested her for allegedly trying to smuggle 14.2 kg of gold from Dubai. It was considered one of the biggest seizures of gold at the Kempegowda International Airport in recent times.

In a press release, DRI stated that the raid at Ranya's residence led to the seizure of jewellery worth Rs 2.06 crore and cash of Rs 2.67 crore, all worth Rs 4.73 crore. "Acting on specific intelligence, DRI officers intercepted an Indian lady passenger aged around 33 years, who had arrived from Dubai to Bengaluru via Emirates flight on March 3, 2025. Gold bars weighing 14.2 kg were found ingeniously concealed on person," it stated. P5

EXPRESS READ

E-City flyover to be shut at night

Bengaluru: Expect traffic snarls on Hosur Road late at night as the main thoroughfare, the Electronic City flyover, will be closed for traffic for a few days. The 10-km Expressway that runs from Bommanahalli to Electronic City will be closed from 11 pm to 6 am starting Wednesday until further notice due to a major maintenance work to be carried out by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). "All types of vehicular traffic will be restricted on both sides of the elevated road from 11 pm to 6 am. During the day, it will be open to vehicles from 6 am to 11 pm," stated a press release from the office of the DCP, traffic (South).

MLA suspended for praising Aurangzeb

Mumbai: Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Asim Azmi was on Wednesday suspended from the Maharashtra legislative assembly over his remarks eulogizing Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Azmi said the action against him was taken despite him retracting his remark. Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath asked the Samajwadi Party to expel him for glorifying the Mughal ruler.

TT ICON SET TO WALK INTO SUNSET

THE FINAL GAME

Multiple Commonwealth and Asian Games medallist Sharath Kamal says it's time to hang racquet and his iconic bandana. The World TT in Chennai to be his last competition as a professional | MORE ON P15

"I feel, stepping away as a player gives me more time to help and develop the sport"

PHOTO: P JAWAHAR

Air India trainer pilot among 30 sacked, 10 others grounded

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

AIR INDIA has fired a simulator trainer pilot for lapses and removed 10 pilots, who underwent training under the trainer pilot, from flying duties pending investigation, the Tata Group airline said Wednesday.

The action came after a whistleblower flagged the simulator trainer pilot of dereliction of duty while training others.

"A detailed investigation was conducted and, following a review of the evidence, the allegation was corroborated. Accordingly, the said trainer pilot's services are being terminated. As a precaution, 10 pilots who underwent recurrent training under the trainer pilot have been removed from flying duties pending further investigation," said an Air India spokesperson.

Air India has reported the matter to aviation regulator DGCA. While Air India did not disclose details of the incident or the trainer's conduct, a source familiar with the matter said the trainer pilot was repeatedly absent during training sessions and violated several other protocols.

Air India also said that it terminated 30 employees in 2024 for various ethical breaches, with numerous others handed disciplinary action. "Immediately following the privatisation of Air India under the Tata group, the airline implemented the Tata Code of Conduct to establish clear behavioural expectations and accelerate cultural change to that of a Tata Group Company," the airline said.

This included comprehensive training for all employees on Tata's ethos and ethics-related policies.

Kane Williamson reverse sweeps versus South Africa on Wednesday | AFP

NZ IN FINAL: KANE AND ABLE WITH RACHIN BY HIS SIDE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

THE story of the Champions Trophy fluctuated between the seemingly devious pitches of Dubai to high-scoring ones in Pakistan. So did the fortunes of most teams. The debate over Dubai favouring India had been in the news more than the grinding cricket they had played in the middle.

The venue will be in focus for one last time on Sunday when India face New Zealand for the title. The Black Caps had always posed some threat to India in big matches, but the way Men in Blue have been playing this time, starting as favourites is a given.

Going by their performance against South Africa in the semifinal on Wednesday, the Black Caps showed they will be no pushovers. A score of 362/6 against South Africa on a wicket that assisted some spin would give them confidence. But what would bring big cheer to the team will be the form of their top order batters, including Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson. Both scored hundreds and played a pivotal role to take the game away from the South Africans. Only solid batting could have saved the latter but fate discarded them later as skipper Mitchell Santner once again tweaked his way into form. May not be high-scoring but the final promises to be one big blockbuster. P15

7 police teams to trace missing Mangaluru boy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state government constituted seven police teams to trace a 17 year-old boy who has gone missing in Mangaluru. The boy, Diganth, has been untraceable since February 25 and the issue was raised by Speaker UT Khader during zero hour in the Assembly on Wednesday.

He said the investigation is going on. He urged the government to look into it. Replying on behalf of Home Minister G Parameshwara, Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa told the House that Diganth was studying 2nd pre-university. On February 25, he went to the college to collect his hall ticket and then returned home. Later, he told his family members he was going to a temple and has been missing since. The police found his mobile phone, but did not get any clues.

BJP Karkala MLA V Sunil Kumar said Diganth was into bhajans. There was also a bandh held at Farangipet to protest against his disappearance.

Khandre wants to reclaim forest land from IAF

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

FOREST Minister Eshwar B Khandre on Wednesday instructed his department officials to reclaim 444.12 acres of forest lands in the possession of the Indian Air Force in Jarakabande Kaval reserve forest patch and in Peenya Plantations.

This comes days after Khandre issued directions and served notice to recover the land in possession of HMT in Peenya.

Khandre said the land parcels in contention with IAF are forest patches and should be recovered as per forest rules. He said of the total 570 acres of land parcels allotted to the IAF in 1987, the state government issued an order in 2017 cancelling the sanction of the 452 acres. However, IAF continues to be in possession of the land. Both the land parcels are listed as forest lands in government records.

Khandre has suggested to the IAF to apply for forest clearance and change of land use on the Parivesh Portal, managed by the ministry of environment, forests and climate change. "The IAF started construction work illegally in the area on March 1 without obtaining forest clearance. I have now been informed by the forest department and have ordered them to stop the work and recover the land," he said.

The forest department has brought the matter to the notice of the IAF and, on Khandre's orders, put up a board on Wednesday in both the land parcels saying it is forest land. "A letter has also been written to the ministry of defence to get the land parcel cleared," he said.

According to forest officials, of the total 570 acres in IAF's possession, 94 acres is in Peenya and the remaining 476 acres in Jarakabande Kaval. "We wrote to the defence ministry multiple times asking them to return the land parcels in both places. On most occasions, there was no response. But on one occasion, they said they had paid Rs 50,000 per acre for 288 acres. But as per government rules and orders, forest land cannot be sold. Besides, the land parcels in contention have not been denotified. We have also asked the defence to return the land parcel in Gantiganahalli state forest in Yelahanka where the Aero India air show is held," a senior forest official told *TNIE*.

There was no response from defence spokespersons.